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Interview with Wanda Hogan Pounds

Dorey Matthew Pounds
Fort Hays State University

Wanda Zudora Hogan

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CHAPTER II

NARRATIVE OF

WANDA ZUDORA PECKHAM-POUNDS-HOGAN:

COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHER

On Saturday, March 20, 1993, informal and formal interviews were given at the home of Wanda Zudora Peckham-Pounds-Hogan, my paternal grandmother, concerning her career as a teacher. Particular attention was paid to those years she taught in one-room schoolhouses in Western Kansas. The interviews took place in the dining room of Grandmother's home in rural Mitchell County. My father, Dewey Max Pounds, also attended the interview and participated as a former student of Mrs. Wanda Zudora Peckham-Pounds-Hogan.

The conversation began with a background of when and where Grandmother taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Western Kansas. She taught in several schools in and around the Mitchell County area. Mitchell County is bordered by Lincoln, Osborne, and Cloud Counties. Some of the Mitchell County one-room schools were District 68, Halfway, Springfield, Center, Roundtop, Asherville, Fieldside, Glen Elder, and the Beloit Junior High School. Other schools and counties that Grandmother taught at were Paris, Union 4, and Trail Creek

which were located in Lincoln County; Silver Arrow was in Cloud County; Muldrow in Sherman County; and Downs which is located in Osborne County.

Grandmother remembered being the first in Mitchell County to move from an old one-room schoolhouse to a modern schoolhouse. The school was Center, and it happened on October 31, 1952. With this building change, Grandmother saw the change from overcrowding, poor heating, outdoor facilities, and safety problems to a more modern atmosphere with gas heating, indoor plumbing, electricity, and brick being used for construction of long lasting buildings with safety in mind.

Another thing that differentiated Grandmother from other teachers in Mitchell County was that she was the highest paid teacher in the county. She and my father remembered that almost every night, school boards from around the area would come and try to talk Grandmother into teaching at their school the following year. This pay was determined between the school board and the teacher. The pay check was usually delivered by a school board member each month with a conversation of what was needed or desired. The paycheck had to be signed by all three members of the school board. Grandmother stated that it was seldom

difficult to get paid on time.

Along with teaching for several years, Grandmother was also a member of a schoolboard. She remembered having served on a school board that, as she recalls, had to close a one-room dilapidated schoolhouse that they still owed one thousand dollars on. The equipment and supplies were sold off to local families, stoves were always in need, and some supplies were taken to the new school or moved to another school. Playground equipment from an old one-room schoolhouse in Mitchell county was bought by my father and is currently on the Peckham homestead now owned by Grandmother.

Many of the old one-room schoolhouses are gone now due to tornadoes, expanded farming, weather, fire, or have been moved to cities for remembrance of the old days. One such schoolhouse is in Beloit, Kansas, on the old highway in a small park. This one-room schoolhouse is red, but the majority were white. Grandmother was honored by being asked to teach one day in the one-room schoolhouse after it was remodeled and opened for historical reasons in town. She recalled that a couple of her students that day were over 100 years old.

While teaching at the one-room schoolhouse,

Grandmother stated, "I taught everything." She then read a daily schedule of the classes and subjects she taught. Courses taught were "reading, writing, arithmetic, English, history, civics, music, and agriculture." She then stated that "I have those textbooks for you." She had at least twenty-five of the old textbooks along with several music books.

She said a school term lasted for eight months with school beginning at nine o'clock sharp and ending at four o'clock. She taught an eight-month term. She said some schools had seven-month terms, and that a nine-month term was almost unheard of in a country school at that time. Parents wanted children to help at home with farm work, so the seven or eight-month term worked well for that. The majority of the work was usually completed by the time school started in September.

Teaching strategies that Grandmother used were the use of bulletin boards, flash cards, oral recitation, and written work with phonics being stressed. At this time, Grandmother stated that "I do not think there is a student I could not teach to read with my phonics." Along with these items, she used the dictionary; she remembered that she usually started with the "Z's" "just for a lark." The globe was also used; they were to know the seven continents from smallest to largest,

and the states in alphabetical order. The chalkboard was helpful with "Visual Education" which she stated was her philosophy of education. Other items used daily in teaching were the use of a compass, ruler, yard stick, and library books.

Special services and activities offered at the one-room schools consisted of music lessons, 4-H, square dancing, county arithmetic contests, county spelling contests, county track meets, and plays. She once taught Laura Hannamon freshman subjects because she could not afford to attend a high school. All one-room grade schools were free of charge to attend. The only costs were tablets and pencils.

The typical curriculum taught began at nine o'clock with opening exercises consisting of The Pledge of Allegiance. This was usually followed by a lot of singing which included the singing of "America the Beautiful," "God Bless America," and many others. Grandmother enjoyed being the accompanist on the piano as much as anything. The third thing she would do was to require them to provide a current event. This reminded her of a time when the students called a current event a "curly event," and she corrected them. Saying "The Lords Prayer" was a priority to her; therefore, each student in grades five through eight were required to memorize,

9

write, and recite the prayer. Once a student wrote the prayer and read it "how will it be thy name," and she corrected it.

To coordinate the classes was a priority in order to keep the classroom organized and structured. The first grade arithmetic would be first at 9:10, second grade would begin at 9:20, third grade at 9:30, and so on until all grades received arithmetic which concluded at 10:30 sharp.

A fifteen minute recess started at 10:30 for the students to use the restroom, to get a drink, and to play games such as Blackman, Dare Base, Andy Over, Steal Stick. When it snowed, the favorite game was Fox and Geese. She remembered one time when the boys found bull snakes in the outhouse, and she told them that if they would put the snakes on the fence, it would rain the next day. It rained the next day, and all the boys were amazed with her as a teacher.

At 10:45, penmanship was stressed to all the grades with individual instruction coming by moving around the room.

Then at 10:55, reading started at 10 minute intervals which concluded at 12 noon. Lunch was an hour long with games of softball usually following the meal. The teacher was always the umpire, referee, or official for all games.

Following lunch the reading would continue until 1:30 when English, also on a ten minute schedule, began. This lasted until 2:30 which allowed the children to take a fifteen minute recess.

The third session started with Geography which was also on ten minute intervals with the only exception being that the seventh and eighth grades only had geography every other day. The final lesson of the day was spelling; it began at 3:35 and continued until 4:00. During this time, they did study words from the textbook at their appropriate grade levels. All grades would write their words on Friday in their best penmanship. She attributed her love of quality penmanship to her male teacher Mr. Ziggenbaugh of Sylvan Grove, Kansas. He taught her to write level on the chalkboard which is not easy as she remembered it. School dismissed at 4:00 p.m.

Discipline was maintained at all times with silence and hand signals the key to success. One finger meant that the student needed to talk quietly with another student, and two fingers meant that the student needed to go to the outside restroom. These signals were recognized with a nod or silent gesture; everyone knew that silence was very important.

Grandmother then stated some of the things that were

different: "No talking aloud, no foolishness, no disrespect, teacher highly respected, no cursing, and very quiet classrooms " Another difference was that parents supported the teacher almost without question.

She believed the students should know what was expected of them. She felt it was important to follow-up on what she asked the students to do. Everything had to have a purpose. She said discipline was never a problem for her, and she never had to involve parents in the discipline process. Another fascinating thing that she felt helped her was that each student would spend the night with her at some point in the year. This allowed the teacher to get to know the student out of school and on a one-on-one basis. Her philosophy of discipline was to find out why they did it and then take away privileges as an appropriate discipline.

Programs that were expected of the students were Christmas, Abraham Lincoln's Birthday, George Washington's Birthday, a program against smoking and drinking, Valentine's Day party, and track meets with other schools in the area. Graduation exercises were held for all the schools with the county superintendent at the county seat. Grandmother played "Pomp and Circumstance" for the entire group to march in and onto the stage several times.

The typical day for the country school teacher began with walking to school in order to arrive around eight o'clock. Then she would bring in fresh water for drinking, stock up on wood for the stove during cold weather, and ring the bell when school was to start. After school, her routine consisted of sweeping the floor, stoking up the stove in winter, cleaning the chalkboards with water, emptying the water pail, preparing lessons for the following day, and walking home to arrive at suppertime about 6 o'clock. Grandmother remembered one time that a couple of boys, including my dad, were waiting around; when it came time to leave, she could not find them. She yelled and looked around for them, but there was no answer. She decided to check the outhouse, and there she found Dewey Max Pounds helping Dick File out of the hole. They told her they saw a board in the hole that they wanted. Dad told her at least he was not the one in the hole!

At that time the teacher lived with a family near the school that had a spare bedroom. They were usually one of the nicest houses and families, at that time it was an honor to have the teacher live with you. A teacher made forty dollars a month and paid ten dollars a month to the family that boarded them. They usually helped out with children

and chores when able to do so.

Some of the differences between old schools and the schools of today are that teachers are expected to show up at school 30 minutes instead of one hour before school; all janitorial work is done for them before school and after; teachers' aides are available to some teachers; the bell rings, and students rush into the classrooms; more than one bathroom is available for each sex; the thermostat controls the heat and air conditioning instead of the teacher controlling the coal furnaces; rooms have fluorescent lights instead of lanterns for lighting; and each subject is taught in a separate room compared to an elevated stage in the front of the classroom. Teachers were also expected to conduct themselves in the community as ladies and gentlemen -- no drinking or smoking by a teacher, no dancing, if a teacher got pregnant or married, they lost their job, and teachers were expected to attend church. Other differences were that teachers did not lose their jobs very often, almost never did more than one teacher work in a school, no principal, and no evaluation system for teachers.

Libraries were in all the schools that she taught in, but they were very limited with regard to numbers of books. The textbooks were selected by the state, and Grandmother

served on the board to select textbooks one year. She remembered being involved in the selection of the textbooks, but there was no limit to what or how it was used.

When talking about attendance problems at that time I was told "No problems occurred because all students were local, and the parents supported the teachers." The normal school size was about nineteen students in grades one through eight.

Most of the students lived within two miles of the school and would arrive on horseback or foot. Almost never did parents drive a student to school. Students never drove a car to school while she taught in a one-room schoolhouse. The majority of the students' parents were farmers and ranchers. Most of the students were white, and she remembered few other nationalities. The children were not allowed to come to school until they were five years old. They were "supposed" to graduate from the eighth grade by the time they were fourteen years old. Grandmother prided herself on making sure her students graduated on time. When she went into a school, she taught whatever trades there happened to be. The majority of the time, a teacher would have all eight grades. She had to be able to teach all eight grades. She also taught music every day. She knew

how to and loved to play the piano for the kids to sing along with.

There were no state competency tests at that time. However, upon completion of the eighth grade, students had to go to the County Superintendent's office in Beloit, Kansas, to take an exam. Upon successfully passing that exam, a student could then go on to high school. The students from Center usually went to high school in Beloit, Kansas.

Outstanding students who attended school where Grandmother taught consisted of a few who became involved in cancer research and several who attended college. One student came to mind whom she taught at Center in Mitchell county -- his name was Ron McCune. He always earned an "A" in every way including manners, respect, discipline, and academic performance. He went on to attend Kansas State, and to her knowledge, he received nothing less than an "A."

The location of the one-room schoolhouse was determined by the location of the center of the population in that small area. The boundary of the school was two and one-half miles in each direction. Very seldom did any family attend a school outside their district. An interesting thing about the limitations of the district were that schools had a large bell that rang informing everyone that school was starting and

that it had ended. Most of the land was donated to the school for the use of the school. When the schools closed, the land was returned to the person or family who had donated it. The funds for building the school came from taxes. The maintenance of the school was done by the three members of the schoolboard: director, clerk, and treasurer. A schoolboard presided over the entire county, not just one school. Some of the names of former schoolboard members are Reed Sanford, Edwin Jordan, Ernest English, Richard Tise, Elden Treaster, Bill Severence, Ben Duff, Harold Muncy, and Hardon Hunter with many of them being deceased. The school board hired and fired the teachers with very few being fired or forced to leave. Many of the school closings happened because of consolidation to update the facilities. Another contributing factor to closing one-room schoolhouses was a growing lack of rural families with children.

For a fund-raiser, the school had a "box-supper." That was an event where the children put on a show and whoever wanted to could bring a box. The box was to be decorated and contained a cold picnic supper for two people. An auctioneer would then auction off one box at a time. Whatever price the boxes brought, the school got that money. Grandmother said these were a lot of fun. She said, "It was

always an honor to buy the teacher's box. Grandfather was not always in favor of having box suppers because he could never afford to buy my box." With the receipts from the box supper, they bought new desks and play-ground equipment such as a slide or some swings.

She still has these keepsakes:

1. A picture of her standing at the Halfway school with the flag flying and the old outhouse.
2. A picture of her son standing between two girls who were always crazy about him.
3. A Bible given to her by former Asherville students on May 22, 1958. She treasures the Bible and reads it almost every day. The young girl who asked Grandmother what she wanted, Ivon James, has now passed away.
4. A certificate for having taught twenty-five years from the University of Kansas. It was presented at the Hunter High School gymnasium during a Mitchell county teachers' meeting.
5. Whistles used to officiate and control students and athletes. These are the actual whistles used for track meets, ballgames, recess, and all other activities.

6. The actual daily schedule of classes and the times that each grades level would have her instruction.
7. A newspaper clipping that showed she was honored by being asked to teach in the one-room schoolhouse which was moved into town and put in the park. No students that day were to be under the age of eighty out of remembrance to the old days. Her grandchildren, Darla Michelle Pounds and Dorey Matthew Pounds, were also asked to ride in the buggy that day along with two other members aged 101 and 102, of the community.
8. Old textbooks and workbooks used for instructional purposes: The Lemonade Stand for music; The Horse who Volunteered, Mother Goose, Bambi, Four Little Kittens, Buckskin, and some textbooks were, Living Together, New Music Horizons, Dewey Pounds' old Dictionary, Health Trails, Keys to Teaching Elementary Music, Elementary Arithmetic, Advanced Arithmetic, History of the United States, The Art of Speaking, Faces and Places, one old book from her school days, and The Story of Kansas. What an old collection of books for

a retired teacher to have in order to bring back memories.

9. The actual hand bell for calling students in from recess and other activities and another small bell for signaling when a class was to change subjects or for which class was to come forward.

Grandmother's education started at Orange Grade School in Lincoln County. Grandmother stated that she only went to grade school for seven years, because she was promoted from third grade to fifth grade. She graduated from grade school at the tender age of 12. After graduating from grade school, she attended Hunter High School in Hunter, Kansas. While at the high school, she took and passed the Normal Training Course which entitled her to teach the following term. The Normal Training Course test was not easy because it covered all the subjects Grandmother remembered. After graduating in 1932, she felt the need to further prepare herself for teaching, so she attended Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas, in the summer of 1932. She had no money to attend the college, so she borrowed forty dollars from Ernest Quadey. She began teaching at the age of sixteen for forty dollars a month and continued to teach for forty years. Her first teaching job was in the 1933 school term in Mitchell County at

District #68. She continued her education during the summers at Kansas Wesleyan University in Salina, Kansas.

Grandmother decided to teach in Western Kansas because she was raised in Western Kansas; she decided to stay near the homestead located in Lincoln County near Hunter, Kansas. The desire to "adventure out" was not financially feasible, and "seeing the world" had not yet appealed to her.

After witnessing the changes in education of the past seventy years, Grandmother commented on whether education was improving or not. She said "I do not think that education is improving; there are so many extra-curricular activities that the subjects are lacking in importance." She did add that she is a little partial to the ways of the past.

As the conversation ended Grandmother thought it was a honor to have "her story" video- and audio-taped, written and preserved for the family and for the history of education in one-room schoolhouses located in Western Kansas. She also said, "It was nice to reminisce with family and think about the old days when she taught school."